Black Religion and Social Justice in Brazil:
The *Movimento Negro* in the Roman Catholic Church

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Introduction

The struggle for social justice has been the dominant theme of the various theologies of liberation originating in Latin America and now spread throughout the third world. While liberation theology has traditionally focused on issues of economic justice defined in terms of class conflict, more recently liberation theology has been influential in the rise of feminist and black theologies. This paper examines a specific case of this in the *movimento negro* (black movement) in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil.

The case of the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Catholic Church, and liberation theology in general, illustrate the continuing power of religion to influence and motivate social activism and change in the midst of modernity and emerging post-modern society. In this instance religion is a critical aspect of the construction of a black racial identity in the multiracial polity of Brazilian Catholicism.

Theoretical Background

Studies of ethnicity have proposed both *non-rational* and *rational* models of ethnic identity. Non-rational models emphasize ethnic identity as a given that individuals and groups are born with. This identity cannot be escaped. Rational theories hold the opposing view that ethnic identity is situational and may change according to the social pressures and the perceptions of group members. Ethnicity is viewed as a voluntary choice (Burgess 1978). Recent studies have suggested that ethnic identity is often fluid and may be rapidly redefined by the groups and individuals involved (Blu 1980; Roosens 1990). In other words, ethnicity and ethnic identity are socially constructed definitions of specific social groups and the individuals comprising them.

Burgess (1978) notes that the idea of a rational -- non-rational continuum has gained acceptance among many scholars. If we place the non-rational and rational ends of the ethnicity continuum on opposite

sides of a dialectic, Berger and Luckmann's (1966) sociology of knowledge generates possibilities for the interpretation of ethnicity that are appropriate for the analysis of the dynamics of race relations in Brazil. Specifically, non-rational ethnic identity would be that identity developed through the internalization of an objectivated symbolic universe with its definitions of ethnicity as found in the culture where one's primary socialization took place. The process of externalization would allow for the switching and creation of new ethnic identities in interaction with other available symbolic universes. The dialectic allows us to view the social construction of ethnic identity as an interaction between both rational and non-rational elements.

A limitation of Berger and Luckmann's theory is that it does not account for the social dynamics of power relations between elites and the dominated in the process of identity construction. James Scott (1990) provides an avenue for addressing this deficiency in his discussion of social relations. Inherent in relations of domination are relations of resistance (Scott 1990, 45). Often, the dominated are unable to express resistance openly (Scott 1990, 102). In such a context the dialogue between the classes takes on the language of the dominant in public while a counter language of resistance develops in private (Scott 1990, 4, 30). Both the resulting *public transcript* and the *private transcript* become critical aspects of the social relationship between dominant and elite.

In order to develop, the hidden transcript carves out for itself a social space where it may be expressed. This social space provides for the building of plausibility structures (Berger and Luckmann 1966) that support the resistance and aid in the creation and sustenance of a counter symbolic universe. In the context of this symbolic universe a new identity may be created that allows the dominated to be empowered to open resistance. Open resistance will occur as soon as social conditions allow for it. In Brazil the *abertura* (opening) with the return of a civilian government in the past decade along with the development of the progressive church have allowed for this (Mainwaring 1986, Mainwaring and Wilde 1989). Black resistance in Brazil, both historical and contemporary, demonstrates how religion may serve as a key social space for the resistance of domination.

The Social Context

Historian E. Bradford Burns sets the context for the discussion of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church in Brazil with his remarks on Brazilian race relations in the introduction to the latest edition of his *A History of Brazil* (1993). Burns states that "Although not free of racial tensions and inequities, Brazil nonetheless serves as one of the best examples of extensive miscegenation and racial harmony. It would seem to have much to teach the rest of the world on the difficult topic of racial relations" (Burns 1993, 4). While it is slightly qualified, this statement is nonetheless an affirmation of the racial democracy thesis.

Racial democracy is the notion that Brazilian society is relatively free from the racial prejudice, discrimination, and tension such as is found in the United States and South Africa. Supporters of this view indicate as evidence in its favor Brazil's alleged peaceful abolition of slavery, the supposed lack of racial violence, the prominence of blacks in Brazilian historical and literary works, the absence of "Jim Crow" or apartheid laws, and the pervasive miscegenation of Brazilian society (Freyre 1956, 1963; Degler 1986; Freire-Maia 1987; Fiola 1990).

The presence of widespread miscegenation is itself fundamental to the notion of *branqueamento* or "whitening" (Silva 1990, 60ff; Skidmore 1974; Fiola 1990). It is alleged that through the mixing of the various peoples of Brazil, the population as a whole is becoming more white and so being "purified" (Skidmore 1985, 13-14). Beyond the idea of biological change in the composition of Brazilian society there are also notions of social whitening. In the social sense it is said that being white is more valued than being black, leading people to adopt white values and attempt to marry lighter skinned partners (Fiola 1990). While the whitening doctrine appears to be contradictory to the racial democracy thesis, the two are usually held together. Perhaps the relationship between the two can best be understood as revealing some of the internal tensions and inconsistencies that exist in Brazilian race relations.

The corollary ideas of racial democracy and whitening developed in Brazilian social thought in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries with the support of leading Brazilian intellectuals and public officials (Skidmore 1974). It has only been within the past two decades that Brazilian and other scholars have issued a

serious challenge to this thesis. Current scholarship has demonstrated that when other variables are controlled, race can be seen to have a significant impact upon social stratification in Brazil (Fontaine 1985; Silva and Hasenbalg 1992). Evidence of racial prejudice and discrimination in Brazil is clearly present in the experiences of subjects interviewed for this study.

In spite of being largely discredited, the tenacity of the racial democracy thesis, even in academic circles, is clear from the statement by Burns previously quoted. Along with its companion, the whitening thesis, it is widely accepted on a popular level throughout Brazil (Fiola, 1990). These ideas were disseminated through the public schools and media to the extent that they have become the dominant interpretation of race relations among the Brazilian people. Together they constitute an important aspect of the ethos of race relations for Brazilian society.[1]

That the racial democracy and whitening ideologies are still held to provides the context for the major problem faced by the *movimento negro* in Brazil. This problem is the great ambiguity of racial identity that has led to the majority of persons of African descent identifying themselves as something other than black. The most recent census data to be published (1980) indicated at least 136 types of responses given to the question concerning race (Moura 1988, 62-63). No more than six percent identified themselves as black. While the most recent census data (1991) remained unpublished at the time of my fieldwork, there is no indication of a significant change.

It can be reasonably argued that the ambiguity of racial identity has hindered the development of a viable black civil rights movement in Brazil (Hanchard 1994). The *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church has taken as its major task the reversal of this state of affairs. This is being done by means of the consciousness raising of Brazilians concerning the reality of racial discrimination in the face of the predominant denial that a race problem exists and the attempt to unify Brazilians of African descent under a

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[1]In defining ethos I am following Max Stackhouse's definition of it as "the subtle web of values, meanings, purposes, expectations, obligations, and legitimations that constitute the operating norms of a culture in relationship to a social entity" or "the network of norms that obtain in a sociocultural setting" (Stackhouse 1972, 5). Racial democracy and whitening compose a major part of this subtle and often not so subtle web in Brazil in relationship to race.

common black racial identity. Through the use of symbols and resources drawn from cultural, historical, and religious traditions the *movimento negro* is attempting to construct such an identity. The purpose of this paper is to give a brief overview of this process and place it in a theoretical context. Specifically, I argue that the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church is engaged in a racial project that utilizes symbols and resources drawn from liberation theology, traditional Roman Catholicism, and African and Afro-Brazilian religious traditions to construct an Afro-Brazilian identity as a counter to the dominant racial ethos.[2] While other cultural resources play a role in this process, I will argue that religion is a vital resource as well as a motivating factor in the construction of black identity and the resistance to domination.

Methodology

This paper is based on interviews conducted during the author's field work in Brazil. Field work was conducted during August - September 1992 and June - September 1993. Principle locations were the urban centers of São Paulo, Rio de Janeiro, and Belo Horozonte. Additional research was conducted in the small town of Itaúna near Belo Horozonte and also in Salvador da Bahia. The diversity of settings allowed for the observation and interviewing of movement participants in different social contexts, both urban and rural, and in different stages of group formation.

While there are several organized groups comprising or related to the *movimento negro* in the Brazilian Roman Catholic Church, the research focused on *Agentes de Pastoral Negro* (Agents of the Black Pastoral). APN is the organization that forms the unofficial hub linking the various aspects of the movement together. Various other groups within the movement were also represented, including *Articulação Nacional dos Padres e*

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[2]The term racial project is borrowed from racial formation theory. The meaning of race, according to racial formation theory, is to be found both in social structure and collective identities as well as individual psyche and relationships. Race is socially and historically constructed and this process continues such that the meaning of race is constantly being contested. Through processes of racial signification racial meanings are determined and racial identities are assigned. Various interpretations of race exist at any given time and these are involved in power relations among various groups of elites and subordinates expressed in their racial projects. Racial projects offer both an interpretation of racial dynamics as well as constituting an attempt to change the social structure of race relations (Winant 1992, 183-184).

Bispos Negros, Commissão de Religiosos, Seminaristas e Padres Negros, and *Grupo de União e Consciência Negra* (GRUCON). Often those participating in one of the latter groups also had been APNs.

Interview subjects were chosen from group participants contacted at group meetings, APN offices and through names given by other movement activists. Access to subjects was largely limited to availability thus limiting the randomness of subject selection. Deliberate efforts were made to get a cross section of participants by including subjects whose ages ranged from late adolescence to senior citizens and whose time of activism ranged from movement founders to less than six months.

Religion, Racial Identity and the *Movimento Negro*

The Problem Defined

Movement participants interviewed consistently defined the problem of blacks in Brazil in terms of the racial democracy and whitening theses. While they pointed to racism and discrimination as the social evils to be conquered, they identified the pervasive acceptance of racial democracy and whitening as the primary impediment to this goal. When asked, subjects showed an awareness of the movements for civil rights in South Africa and the United States. They contended that there were things to be learned from these movements but that racism in Brazil is worse than that of these other countries, precisely because it is hidden. The fact that no one admits that it exists makes it much more difficult to confront. One respondent noted that with the apartheid laws of South Africa it was easy to tell who was the enemy while in Brazil one never knew. Respondents often pointed out that even though the Brazilian constitution classifies racism as a crime, no one has ever been convicted of it. The consensus was that racial democracy creates a racism that is "hidden" and "masked" making it very difficult to get either the authorities or society in general to admit that it exists and take measures to end it.

Subjects viewed racism and racial discrimination in Brazil as being everywhere. They described them as being subtle much of the time but they also gave blatant examples. Almost every subject reported specific instances of being victimized by prejudice and discrimination. In addition interviewees consistently spoke of discrimination in the workplace and racism in the media as primary refutations of racial democracy.

Informants often used the term *negritude* to designate their sense of black racial identity[3] Otherwise subjects spoke of their identity as simply black.[4] Brazilians with African ancestry who fail to identify as such were said to be victims of the ideology of whitening. One respondent summarized it by saying,

> of every 100 blacks people, 70 do not consider themselves black. They are victims to the highest degree of the ideology of whitening. It is also no different in the church. Priests, nuns, seminary students, and even Catholic lay people themselves, out of every 100, 70 or more do not assume their negritude.

According to movement participants the whitening ideology defines everything that is good as being white while black represents everything evil. Consistent with the social whitening described by Fiola, interviewees said that everyone wants to adopt white culture and be white. A prominent example of this is the tendency of dark skinned Brazilians to seek lighter skinned mates for their children. Some of the women interviewed reported strong opposition from their parents to them having black boyfriends. Beyond the negative cultural stereotypes against blacks a key reason given was that the parents wanted their grandchildren to be born with lighter skin so that they would not suffer the same discrimination that the parents had experienced. This last reason is a tacit admission that the racial democracy theory is not really accurate by those who nevertheless appear to support it.

Beyond simply challenging the reality of Brazilian racial democracy, black activists go a step further in contending that racial democracy and whitening theories have been deliberately perpetrated by Brazilian elites in order to preserve white domination over blacks.

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[3]The term *negritude* as used by the movement seems to bear little or no direct relationship to the concept of negritude developed in French literature by such writers as Léopold Senghor. That is not to say that there is no influence at all. The strong influence of French culture on Brazil in general suggests that such a connection is plausible. Hanchard (1994) has shown that the secular *movimento negro* was influenced by pan-africanism. It is likely that the term negritude came into the movement in the progressive church from this source. However, the meaning of negritude for the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church is a product of the unique Brazilian social situation.

[4]The Portuguese *negro* is the preferred designation used by movement activists. It is the literal equivalent of the English "negro" but the cultural equivalent of the English "black." The Portuguese *preto* is the literal equivalent of "black." However, *preto* is a pejorative term that is considered insulting and condescending by activists. I have used the English "black" to translate *negro* as this gives the English reader a more culturally equivalent sense of the word's meaning.

Hence, no solution can be expected from whites and the white controlled government. Instead, blacks must create a grassroots movement and overcome racism from below. This cannot be done until the majority of Brazilians assume their identities as blacks.

What is a Black?

An underlying assumption that appeared in the interviews was that negritude or blackness is an objective reality that exists apart from any subjectively felt or experienced sense of racial identity. This assumption is clear in the characterization of those who reject this identity as victims of the whitening ideal. Common designations such as "brown" and "light brown" were dismissed as being false identities that only served to obscure the reality of one's negritude. However, one respondent indicated that those who have not assumed their negritude are not accepted as being black. This inconsistency with other statements could refer to the need for the group to maintain a sense of boundaries regarding who is considered a fellow activist.

Subjects identified the qualities of being black in terms of phenotype and culture. When asked how they would determine if another person, for example someone they met on the street, were black, specific physical traits were mentioned. The presence of traits indicating even a small degree of African ancestry was usually viewed as sufficient to qualify. Skin color was given as an indicator, but activists considered even those with light skin to be black if they have other characteristics such as hair, nose and lips that are typical of Africans. They articulated a view that any degree of African ancestry is sufficient to *blacken* a person. This is in direct opposition to the dominant Brazilian mentality.

The meaning of being black also includes a strong element of accepting and participating in African and Afro-Brazilian cultural traditions. Cultural elements consistently mentioned by subjects included music, dance, style of dress and hair, and religion. Each of these provide symbols that become important signifiers of black racial identity. The deliberate adoption of these values sets the whitening process in reverse and serves both as a form of identity construction and as a rejection of the dominant racial ethos.

Throughout the interviews the subjects gave the role of religion in black identity a central place. Respondents asserted that blacks are an essentially religious people and that this aspect of black culture must be valued if black identity is to be valued. This includes the acceptance of African and Afro-Brazilian religions on an equal footing with other religions. To do otherwise would be taken as a racist stance against African culture.

Most of the interviewees identified themselves as practicing Catholics.[5] Two of the subjects reported very little involvement in the Church outside of movement activities. Another had become active but admitted not feeling comfortable being called Catholic due to the history of the Catholic Church's support for slavery in colonial Brazil. It was interesting to discover that two of the subjects were Protestants who became participants in APN because of there being no openness to dealing with racial issues in their own churches. The movement is self-consciously ecumenical so that Protestants were welcomed.

The relation toward Afro-Brazilian religions is perhaps one of the areas of greatest controversy generated by the movement. Intense criticism of the movement emerged from conservative elements in the Church after a nationally televised documentary describing the movement was aired on the SBT network in 1993. While the documentary did not give a negative portrayal of the movement, it was taken by many as confirming their suspicions that the *movimento negro* in the Catholic Church represents an attempt to bring Candomblé into the church. This is a charge vigorously denied by the movement.

The basis of conservative fears lies in the introduction of symbols and artifacts of Afro-Brazilian religions such as music, dance, clothing, into Roman Catholic liturgy by the movement. Movement leaders argue that the traditional liturgy is a product of white European culture and that they are only attempting to use symbols developed by blacks so that the black way of being religious will be adequately expressed. They reason that since the majority of Brazilians are black by their definition, then in order to valorize the negritude of the people the Church ought to be blackened. They insist that it is only the symbols and not the theology of African religion that is being introduced.

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[5] The term *Catholico praticante* has specific reference in Brazil to a person who is actively involved in contrast to its opposite, *Catolico não-praticante* denoting nominal Catholics.

The appropriation of Afro-Brazilian religious symbols has generated division within the movement itself. All of the subjects agreed that these symbols are important for the recovery of black identity but they did not agree on how they should be used. Most of the subjects interviewed are in favor of Afro-Brazilian masses, weddings, baptisms, and ordinations as an appropriate expression of black culture in a Roman Catholic context. Others see this as a misuse of African religious symbols that actually destroys their true meaning by removing them from their proper context.

All respondents agreed that an ecumenical stance towards African religions is necessary. It was not unusual to find activists who identified themselves as serious Catholics who also took part in Candomblé. They denied that they were participating in syncretism. Instead they viewed each as distinct traditions that should not be confused. However, they saw no conflict between the two. Others had a similar attitude but did not participate in African religions. Some only observed or studied them in order to learn more about the faith of their ancestors. All subjects agreed that African religions were good and represented an aspect of their heritage that helped them to find value in being black.

That those in the movement could engage in the transposition of symbols from one religious context to another and also freely participate in two very different religious traditions simultaneously, all the while denying that they are mixing them together, is possible because the movement is based largely on the assumptions of ecumenical theology represented by the progressive elements in the Latin American Roman Catholic Church. The underlying presupposition articulated by subjects interviewed was that each tradition represents different revelations of the same God in different cultures. Each culture develops its own set of symbols to explain its experience of God and as heirs of both African and Christian traditions they have the right to freely use symbols from both contexts.

The ecumenical stance of the movement is natural as it originally arose out of the social context of liberation theology and the base communities.[6] While subjects indicated that they were not aware of any base

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[6]APN originated in 1983 as an outgrowth of GRUCON. GRUCON developed as the continuation of a study group that was organized to make recommendations to the meeting of Latin American Bishops at Puebla in 1979 concerning the situation of blacks in Latin America.

communities devoted primarily to the *movimento negro*, those who had been involved in the movement for longer periods spoke of participation in base communities as an important part of the change in consciousness that made them aware of the need for a black movement.

The gospel of Jesus Christ and the nature of the Kingdom of God were typically defined in terms that showed the clear influence of liberation theology. The Kingdom of God, for example, is something to be realized in history through social activism. It symbolizes a world where justice rules and where there are no racial, social or economic inequalities. It is a world where everyone is valued for who they are. The preaching of the gospel is the spreading of the message of equality and justice.

The political views of subjects interviewed were also consistent with liberation theology. Some respondents went so far as to add a political stance to their definitions of what it means to be black. Being black involves taking up a militant posture against the racists, capitalist society dominated by the white elite. It entails becoming a militant and actively working for the black cause. Those who would not take such a stand would not be included among those who have adequately assumed their identity. They are in need of further conscientiazation. Even among those who did not make such a strong assertion, political activism constituted an important part of their own identity as blacks. Being black means being one who resists racism and discrimination whenever it occurs.

Subjects were critical of capitalism, tending to favor socialist political and economic policies. Support for the Worker's Party (PT) was almost unanimous, although defeats in recent elections had created some doubts about the future. These doubts were heightened by preexisting questions about both liberation theology and the PT. Subjects viewed them as being products of whites and therefore limited in their usefulness. It would be up to blacks to create their own theology and to assume political power from the bottom up by raising the consciousness of other blacks.

The interviews made plain that the movement's concept of blackness involves all aspects of personal and social life. Negritude was identified as a way of being. It appears as part of an emerging symbolic

universe shaped by the social context of the dominant symbolic universe supporting racial democracy and whitening and directly challenging it.

Changing and maintaining identity

For the movement activists interviewed, negritude is something that must be consciously taken up or assumed. While a few of the activists interviewed stated that they had always known that they are black, the majority described the process of assuming a black identity as a *discovery* of their blackness or negritude. This discovery required a shift from the dominant symbolic universe and was frequently describe in terms comparable to a conversion experience. One respondent recounted this discovery as "something very marvelous that thus changed completely, totally my life from water to wine... a new Maria[7] began and I changed much as a person."

Assuming one's negritude therefore means a fundamental change in one's attitude toward everything associated with being black. It is to begin to value that which is devalued in the Brazilian ethos of race. The valorization of black culture, religion, and the black physical appearance thus leads to a new self image. This self image is the affirmation that one is black and that being black is good.

Although they are often accused of creating a new form of racism against whites, movement activists reject this charge. They were insistent upon denying that their position is an assertion of black superiority. Rather it is, as one subject stated, "to negate the negation that someone makes of my culture." This negating the negation means the negation of the popular interpretation of Brazilian society. In short, assuming negritude involves a rejection of the symbolic universe represented by the racial democracy and whitening theories and participating in the process of constructing a new symbolic universe. It involves the reinterpretation of Brazilian society and racial values in terms of this new universe.

Berger and Luckmann argue that a symbolic universe requires plausibility structures to sustain its credibility. Much of the construction of identity in the movement consists of building such structures from the symbols of the religious traditions described above. The blackening of the Catholic Church with African

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[7]Name has been changed.

symbols represents the reclaiming of a system that in the past has served as a plausibility structure for the dominant system. Afro-Brazilian religions interpreted in an ecumenical context, along with the APN and other groups also serve as important plausibility structures.

The building of a black identity through the use of religious and cultural symbols is viewed as a project of recovery. A key word used by movement participants is *resgatar*, meaning to ransom, redeem, or liberate. Most frequently the movement uses it to refer to redeeming the identity, cultural, and religious traditions which participants view as having been stolen and hidden from them by white oppressors. A major aspect of this recovery project is the revision of the history of Brazilian blacks.

The "official" history as told by proponents of racial democracy portrays a peaceful relationship between good masters (*o bom senhor*) and docile slaves, according to the movement.[8] Movement activists are telling a very different story. It is a story having as its main theme the resistance of blacks to their oppression. According to subjects interviewed a key locus of this resistance was in slave religion.

The well-known syncretism of Roman Catholic and African traditions by slaves is understood as a necessity brought on by oppression rather than the result of the mixing of African and Portuguese cultures. The slaves are viewed as heros who preserved their culture and faith by hiding it behind Roman Catholic religious symbols. This enabled them to survive and even fight back against enslavement. African religious symbols thus carry a strong connotation of resistance for movement participants. This understanding of the history of slave religion is presented in the context of liberation theology such that religious faith becomes a powerful motivator to activism.

The resistance of black slaves is epitomized for the movement in the history of the *quilombos*, free African communities founded in still uncolonized areas by runaway slaves. The most prominent of these was the Palmares *quilombo* that functioned for the better part of the seventeenth century as a free state. Subjects interviewed saw Palmares as an enclave where African cultural and religious traditions contributed to a

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[8]An important aspect of the racial democracy thesis is the portrayal of slavery in Brazil as lacking in the cruelty found in other parts of the world. Tannenbaum (1946) is an often cited example of this. Recent research has demonstrated that Brazilian slavery was actually quite harsh and cruel (Conrad 1986).

generally egalitarian and just society. The importance of the *quilombos* as symbols for the movement is underscored by noting that the regional headquarters of the movement are typically called *quilombos*. The symbolism of religion and the *quilombos* attached to these centers is critical to their role as plausibility structures that support the conception that to be black is to be one who resists.

An often mentioned aspect of the shift that occurs when interviewees assumed a black identity was the willingness to face persecution. Ranging from ridicule from family to threats against jobs and lives, subjects reported that assuming negritude had a high cost. However, they also reported that as they previously suffered from discrimination "with heads bowed," now they challenge it. This brought a new sense of dignity. On the other hand, by running counter to the expected compliance with the accommodation to white culture it sometimes entailed serious risks. In contrast, there seemed to be no immediate social or economic gains from assuming a black racial identity. When asked of their hopes for the movement, typically subjects spoke of a better world for their grandchildren. They believed in the reality of the Kingdom of God and had real hopes that the struggle for liberation would see it arrive. However, all of them expressed skepticism about seeing it their own lifetimes. Clearly, the plausibility structures provided by the religious symbolism of the movement were deemed by subjects as adequate to continue the struggle and maintain black identity, without any apparent immediate material benefits.

Discussion and Conclusion

I have proposed that the process of racial identity construction can be understood in terms of a dialectic between non-rational and rational choice processes describable in terms of the dialectic of social construction presented by Berger and Luckmann. In addition I have suggested Scott's model of the resistance of subordinate groups illumines an essential aspect of this. This process involves relations of domination and resistance between the dominant group, which is attempting to control the public discourse on the meaning of race through the established ethos of race, and the subordinate group, which is engaged in

a counter discourse in those social spaces, public and private, available to it. The racial project of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil, to create a black identity in the midst of the ambiguously defined racial identities of the Brazilian racial ethos, provides an example of this.

Brazilians acquire their initial racial identity through socialization into the predominant ethos of race that divides the majority of persons of African descent into the multitude of categories designated as "brown" in the census data. This process of the internalization of the objectivated ethos of racial democracy and whitening may be viewed as a non-rational, non-chosen, formation of racial identity. In this model the non-rational element of this identity does not consist primarily in the specific designation used as much as it does in being identified as anything but black.

It may also be the case that this initially non-rational identity becomes grounded on more rational choice considerations. Empirical data shows that the social and economic position of mulattoes is as damaged by discrimination as that of blacks (Silva 1985, 43). The attempted whitening of one's family by encouraging children to marry lighter skinned partners suggests that Brazilians are aware that darker skin means less social and economic opportunity. Rather than being fooled by the racial democracy theory they attempt to escape its effects by constructing a non-black identity. The closer this identity can approximate white, the better it is hoped their situation will be. Although the evidence suggests that mulattos suffer discrimination equal to blacks, it appears that Brazilians do believe that there are fewer damaging social consequences to being mulatto if one is on the lighter end of the scale. This presents the interesting scenario in which those who profess to believe that Brazil is a racial democracy act in a manner that presupposes that Brazil is in fact not a racial democracy. This suggests an underlying layer of resistance that is present among those who according to the accepted orthodoxy should have no reason to resist. It is also a form of resistance by conformity. "If you can't beat 'em, join 'em." Further research needs to be conducted in order to determine the relationship between non-rational and rational choice elements in what appears to be a complex and even contradictory process.

That such a contadictory state of affairs exists is testimony both to the strength of the socialization into the racial democracy ideology and also the inevitablility of resistance to domination. The strength of the internalization of the racial democracy and whitening theses is further indicated in that it is the predominant problem faced by the *movimento negro*. It is also evidenced as those assuming black identity experience what appears as a conversion. This is indicative of the shifting between two symbolic universes that are in competition.

Meanwhile the APNs are at the other side of the dialectic as they reconstruct black identity and attempt to externalize it into the Brazilian racial ethos. On this side, racial identity is consciously chosen, even as it is in the process of reconstruction.

On each side of the dialectic are opposing symbolic universes, that while sharing many common elements, nevertheless differ in their understanding of the meaning of fundamental religious and cultural symbols. It is of the religious vision of a symbolic universe constructed from liberation theology, Afro-Brazilian religious traditions, and traditional Roman Catholicism that much of the motivation for resistance and identity construction in the movement is being drawn. Religious symbols, rituals, and the social structure of the groups provide the plausibility structures needed for identity construction and maintenance.

The importance of religion as a factor in identity maintenance is seen in that the assumption of identity is often costly. One cannot explain the choice of racial identity in this case in terms of economic or social gain. Religion provides values and hopes that enable the individual to look beyond immediate personal benefits in order to gain what is perceived as a higher good.[9]

The reconstruction of black history by the movement looks to the hidden transcript (Scott 1990) of resistance among blacks in Brazil and attempts to bring it into the public discourse as a means of challenging accepted notions in the dominant racial ethos. Likewise, the transformation that takes place when one assumes black identity causes reactions to discrimination that would have previously been kept in the private realm to be directed into open resistance and confrontation.

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[9]This is reminiscent of Stark and Bainbridge's (1985) notion of compensators.

In conclusion it is important to note that the rise of the *movimento negro* in the Roman Catholic Church of Brazil is occurring in a society beset with the problems and changes associated with modernity and emerging post-modernity. The debate over the status of secularization theory is likely to continue with the continuing relevance for religion as a significant player in social transformation being evidenced in movements such as the one presented in this paper. While the ultimate success of the movement in attaining its goals remains questionable, its vitality and ability to create a significant voice of protest indicate that religion will remain an important force in Brazilian society for the foreseeable future.

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